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Coalition of Environmental, Health, and Children Advocates Unveil Legislation to Create \$45 Million Annual Clean Air and Energy Independence Fund

(Sacramento, CA) On the heels of the University of Southern California's 13 year study showing that living near freeways causes lasting and significant damage to children's lungs and the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, Assistant Assembly Majority Leader Kevin de León (D-Los Angeles), along with Assembly Members Mark DeSaulnier and Jared Huffman, today introduced legislation to create the State's first fund for alternative fuel research. A broad-based coalition of environmental, health, and children advocates joined Mr. de León to announce its introduction.

"This USC study tells us what most of us living near freeways already know—that living near such busy roads is dangerous to your health; but none of us realized just how dangerous," said Assistant Majority Leader Kevin de León. "Representing a district that is crisscrossed by six major freeways, I believe it's imperative that this Legislature act immediately to create an ongoing program to combat that pollution and develop alternative clean burning and renewable fuel sources."

Currently in California, air pollution is a major public health epidemic causing premature deaths, permanent lung damage, skyrocketing asthma rates and other respiratory illnesses. Children are particularly vulnerable to health risks associated with air pollution as demonstrated in the USC study. In Los Angeles County alone, asthma is responsible for over 12,000 hospitalizations annually, with most of those patients being children. Furthermore, asthma is the leading cause for elementary school absenteeism, and hospitalizations for such illnesses cost California's economy billions of dollars every year in health care expenses and lost productivity.

Automobile emissions are not only a leading cause of smog, they're not only the leading source of greenhouse gases causing world-wide climate changes, according to the U.N.'s IPCC climate change report, but also the source of potentially catastrophic environmental changes here in California. Our energy needs are becoming increasingly more reliant upon foreign oil. Relying on foreign fuel from extremely volatile and unpredictable markets is a major threat to California's economic stability and our long-term economic interests.

"Cleaning our air isn't only important to protecting our children from permanent lung damage, it's also essential to combating global warming and breaking our dangerous addiction to foreign oil," said Assistant Majority Leader Kevin de León.

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Last year the Legislature and the Governor set aside \$25 million in one-time funds for alternative fuel research and market-based incentive programs for clean and renewable energy technology development. Given the growing shortfalls in this year's State budget, it is unlikely those funds will be renewed again this year. Assembly Bill 255 would create a permanent fund source for that clean air program by increasing the Smog Abatement Fee from \$12 to \$16. The Smog Abatement Fee is a fee that owners of car models six years or newer pay to opt out of the smog check requirement. The fee increase would generate over \$45 million annually for the Clean Air and Energy Independence Fund.

The Smog Abatement Fee was set at \$12 two years ago in a budget bill with little to no debate. The four dollar increase would still provide car owners a substantial savings over having to pay for a smog check while generating over \$45 million annually to help clean our air, reduce global warming, as well as our dependency on foreign oil. The four dollar increase would be dedicated to the California Clean Air and Energy Independence Fund, administered by the California Air Resources Board, and would fund alternative fuel research and development as well as market based incentive programs for clean and renewable energy technologies.

Assembly Bill 255 is supported by the American Lung Association, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Sierra Club, the California Academy of Family Physicians, the Coalition for Clean Air, the Clean Power Campaign, the California League of Conservation Voters, Environment California, Children NOW, Global Green, U.S.A., the Latino Coalition for a Healthy California, and the Union of Concerned Scientists. The measure will be heard in policy committee this spring and may come to a vote on the Assembly floor in late May.

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